

Disney Animations and Animators

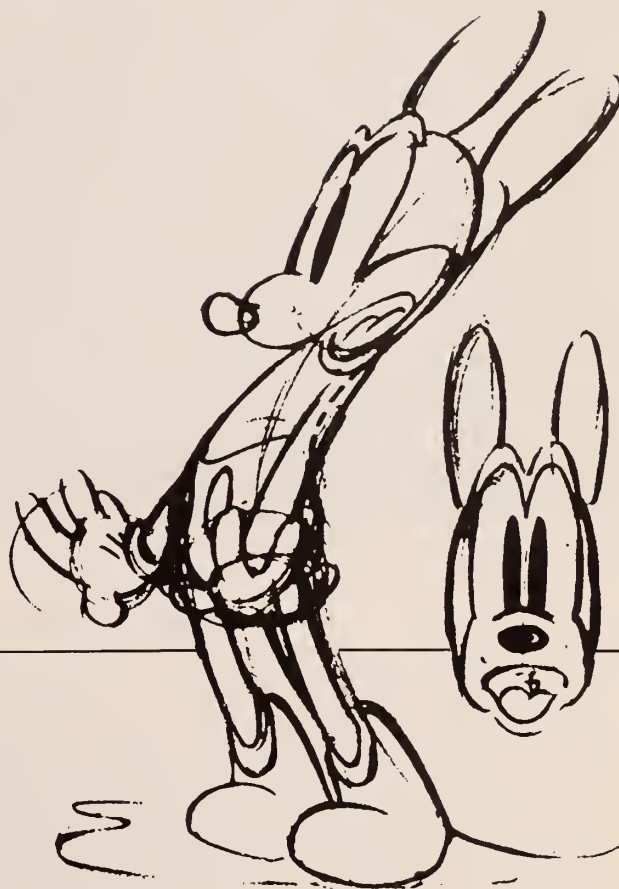
Whitney Museum of American Art

June 24–September 6, 1981

Walt Disney is acclaimed throughout the world for his unique contribution to the art of animation and film. No single figure has so dominated this art form as he, and none has received so much popular and critical acclaim. Disney's films have captured the public imagination and the characters he created are part of the iconography of twentieth-century American culture. At the same time, they broke new ground in the aesthetics and techniques of animation.

The man who was responsible for this extraordinary body of work was born in 1901 in Chicago and grew up in Kansas City, where he developed his interest in the graphic arts and animation. In 1923 Disney moved to southern California, establishing what became, ten years later, the world's pre-eminent animation studio. In 1928, he released Steamboat Willie, featuring Mickey Mouse, the first cartoon with a fully synchronized soundtrack. This film initiated the classic period of the Disney Studio and of the art of animation. From the 1930s through the early 1940s, Disney guided the creation of a group of cartoon characters that joined the ranks of America's most popular folk heroes: Mickey Mouse, Minnie Mouse, Donald Duck, Goofy, and Pluto. In addition, Disney's animators produced the Silly Symphonies series (including Music Land, 1935, and The Tortoise and the Hare, 1935), where they experimented with and developed new graphic and movement ideas. This period also saw the production of the major animation features--Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937), Pinocchio (1940), Fantasia (1940), Dumbo (1941), and Bambi (1942)--which remain unparalleled in their visual sophistication and treatment of character and narrative.

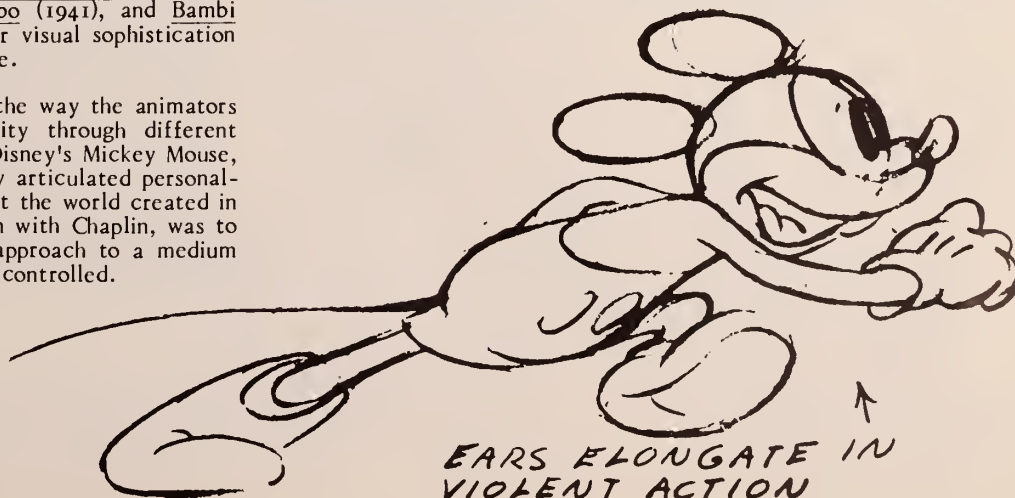
What is so distinctive in these films is the way the animators invested their characters with personality through different drawing styles and graphic techniques. Disney's Mickey Mouse, like Charlie Chaplin's Tramp, has a subtly articulated personality designed to interact with and interpret the world created in the film. The success of Disney, as again with Chaplin, was to have an assured, inventive, yet playful approach to a medium whose potential he fully understood and controlled.



WHEN DISTORTING THE BODY RETAIN THE NORMAL COLUMN IN ALL PARTS

Disney transformed and expanded the language and vocabulary of animated films. Thus camera movement, composition of the film frame, depth of field, editing of individual shots, timing and pacing of action within a scene, the distortion of action and movement--all were fully explored to guide story development. In the process, Disney was able to give an appearance of rapidly accelerated camera movement and changing point of view that was seldom matched in the live-action films of the time.

In Disney's best work, there is a feeling of authenticity--of rendering the imaginary real. "Disney Animations and Animators" makes clear that this bold innovation evolved out of a





The photographs illustrate Walt Disney and his collaborators, seen in various stages of creating animation ideas and characters, at Walt Disney Studios.

complex process involving many people who influenced all stages of creative development. Disney developed a collaborative system of movie-making tailored to realize his ambitions for the art of animation. He was the creative director of the productions, even though early on he stopped drawing animation himself. He created an environment in the studio and set a standard which allowed for individual creativity on the part of the animators, background artists, and effects animators. With their individual talents and distinctive styles, these people informed and shaped every movement on the screen.

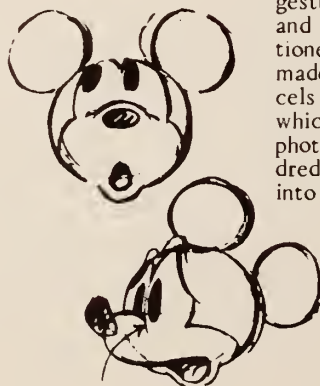
The production of a film from inception to completion had many stages but did not follow a single formula. It usually began with the conceptualization of the story idea, followed by story conferences between Disney and the writers. Animators were assigned characters and characters were defined within the framework of the story. The action was then sketched out, with the description of scenes and narrative development, and the individual characters often discussed and studied through Disney's own gestures and mime, as well as by analyzing sculptural models, actors, and animals. Together with the layout of the action of the animated figures, there was the visualization and coloring of the backgrounds within which they moved--the imaginary scenery, buildings, and spaces, both representational and abstract. Music and sound effects were added, which enhanced the character's reactions. It was this naturalistic emphasis that Disney sought in his synthesis of the soundtrack and the image.

The relationship of Disney to this whole production process was neither cut-and-dry nor definable by one production pattern. He set up a situation in which artists could create both as individuals and collectively. There was no strict formula, but rather a give-and-take, a gesture, a comment, a demand, by which Disney drew out of everyone the result he sought. In this process, each animator worked on specific scenes or characters which followed their individual understanding of what Disney wanted and which were continually tested in countless screening sessions. Disney also sought to stimulate himself and his animators with new ideas by setting up art classes and bringing in artists from other fields. In this environment, the animators drew from every corner of their experience, pushing themselves to try something new, and ultimately realizing what Disney was looking for.

Animation is an art of drawing intended to create a moving image on the screen. What we view in a darkened theater is literally thousands upon thousands of drawings which convey and define each fraction of movement. The movie camera records on each film frame a still image which, when processed, passes through the projector at so many frames per second (24 frames per second for a sound film) to create the optical illusion of continuous action. Each of those frames may require an individual drawing, each slightly different from the preceding image. Animation is thus a hand-made image drawn on paper, transferred to film, and projected onto the screen.

In animation, the hand of the artist articulates and controls the action, the timing of the movement, the subtlety of individual gestures on the screen. The animators' first sketches outline and detail the characters, and the characters are then positioned against the background elements. Then a test reel is made to check the movement, the sketches are cleaned up, the cels are painted. (A cel is a cleaned-up drawing on celluloid which is painted and then photographed.) The cels are photographed against backgrounds, some scenes requiring hundreds of cels. In this way the initial outlines are transformed into solid configurations.

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OF THE FACE



y Productions, Burbank, California.

"Disney Animations and Animators" opens with a technical introduction to the tools and steps involved in producing an animated film. The exhibition begins with a display of the animation process from conception to the completed film, demonstrated in a scene from *The Fox and the Hound* (1981). Here we see the relationship between early sketches, cleaned-up drawings, painted cels, and backgrounds. *The Fox and the Hound* is the only Disney animation for which all elements of the production process have been preserved on film.

The next section focuses on the pioneer period of Walt Disney filmmaking (1927-32), beginning with the development of Mickey Mouse. In these years, the Disney Studio developed a basic vocabulary of animation. The installation illustrates the early techniques used to convey character animation and the formal departure from a flattened, two-dimensional style of animation. Whereas in earlier animations the characters moved back and forth across the plane of the screen, here they move in and out of depth--a spatial perspective that creates a dynamic visual field of action. The work of Ub Iwerks, an early collaborator with Disney who developed Mickey Mouse, is featured in this section, along with that of Norman Ferguson, who created Pluto. Motion studies are centered on the character rather than the background, and the action is highlighted with such devices as "squash-stretch," in which a character expands and contracts in an exaggerated physical expression of movement; "overlapping action," in which two or more actions take place simultaneously in the foreground and background; "animation of weight," in which a sense of heaviness and mass is visually expressed through an extreme response--for example, a bridge sagging under a truck's weight. This section also demonstrates the early uses of image/sound synchronization and how this affected the action in the scene.

The following section details and contrasts the Mickey Mouse films with the Silly Symphonies. Both series are represented with story boards, animation sequences, cels, and backgrounds. In the Silly Symphonies these elements reveal an animation concept that emphasized naturalistic scenes, particularly in the films' backgrounds. The Mickey Mouse films, by contrast, deal with extended character development and psychological interaction, especially between Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and Goofy. The sequence demonstrates in greater detail how individual animators were developing character over an extended series of films. Both the Mickey Mouse and Silly Symphonies forms of animation would greatly influence the later Disney films and the future of animation.

The role of the specific animators in creating the Disney films is presented in the next section of the exhibition. More than just names, the individual animators--among them, Fred Moore, Dick Lundy, Art Babbitt, and Vladimir Tytla--made specific and distinctive contributions to the films. Their work is illustrated through animation sequences that clearly describe how the character of an animation figure came out of the drawing style of a particular artist.

How the Disney animators further developed personality in both characters and nature is explored in the next section. Ward Kimball's Jiminy Cricket, Frank Thomas' Pinocchio, Tytla's Devil from *Fantasia*, and Lundy's dances evolved not only from these animators' drawing styles, or from the narrative, but as well from their own definition of each character. Disney in fact "cast" animators the way producers cast actors and actresses, giving each one leeway to create roles, so that their distinctive drawing strengths and the personality of their drawing style would continually inform the character and story idea. Nature, too, was invested with personality: objects and plants, colors and designs all took on individual anthropomorphic character.

The next to last section is devoted to "the nine old men," those animators who had the most profound effect on defining the distinctive quality of Disney animation. Animation drawings highlight and isolate what Milt Kahl, Eric Larson, Les Clark, Marc Davis, Frank Thomas, Ward Kimball, Ollie Johnston, John Lounsberry, and Wolfgang Reitherman contributed to the history of Disney animation. Also on view is some of the actual equipment used by the artists to produce the films.





The final part of the exhibition concentrates on the major feature films: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Pinocchio, Fantasia, Dumbo, and Bambi. In addition to the animation drawings, backgrounds, and cels selected from the films, the sculptural and puppet models used to help create the characters are on display. All the elements needed to produce a sustained feature-length animation appear in sequence: the development of personality, of character relationships, of the total narrative in its physical world—not an abstract environment, but one that breathes with the personality and spirit invested in it by the concentration of individual talents. Sergei Eisenstein, the celebrated Russian film director, wrote in an essay entitled "The Embodiment of a Myth": "Men, music, light, landscape, color, and motion brought into one integral whole by a single piercing emotion, by a single theme and idea—this is the aim of a modern cinematography." In that 1940 essay Eisenstein cited scenes from Walt Disney's Snow White as exemplifying that ideal.

Disney character animation represents the most successful and sustained realization of a world within the film frame. Greg Ford's selection of works highlights the drawings as discrete items and as part of a process. The process concludes in the film projected onto the screen, and many of the most important Disney short films and features are being shown as part of this exhibition. In addition, throughout the galleries videotape monitors present individual sequences which illustrate the animation process. From this exhibition we can look again at the films and recognize familiar faces and actions—and appreciate what a rich and provocative body of drawing and film art Disney animations are.

John G. Hanhardt
Curator, Film and Video



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Acknowledgments

"Disney Animations and Animators" could only have been made possible by the full cooperation and generosity of many institutions and individuals: Greg Ford, Guest Curator; SITE, installation designer (Theodore Adamstein, Project Director; Patricia Phillips, Assistant); Walt Disney Productions (Thomas L. Wilhite, Vice-President, Creative Development; Charles L. Richardson, Creative Development; David R. Smith, Archivist; Leroy Anderson, Supervisor of Animation Research; William Latham, Public Relations). The following collectors and institutions loaned works to the exhibition: Richard Amsel, Preston Blair, Joel Cohen, Shamus Culhane, Edward Deep, Walt Disney Productions (Burbank and New York), Galerie St. Etienne (New York), Ollie Johnston, Mark Kausler, Jack Stuart Kern, Jan Kucik, John C. Lange, Robert Lesser, Lou Marcus, Mark Mitchell, James P. Mondhank, The Museum of Modern Art (New York), Milton Neil, Maurice Noble, Janet Novak, Billy Rose Theater Collection (New York Public Library at Lincoln Center), Beverly and Ray Sacks, Mrs. Vladimir Tytla, and anonymous lenders.

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Film Programs

Programs Subject to Change

Seating Extremely Limited

June 24-28

Program 1
(Introduction)
Daily at 1:00 and 3:30

Newman's Laugh-o-Grams, 1920
Alice's Wonderland, 1922-23
Oh, What a Knight, 1927-28
Plane Crazy, 1928
Skeleton Dance, 1929
The Band Concert, 1935
Three Little Pigs, 1933
Three Little Wolves, 1936
Woodland Cafe, 1937
Thru the Mirror, 1936

June 30-July 5

Program 2
(Mickey Mouse &
Silly Symphonies I)
Daily at 1:00; also Tues. at 6:15
The Karnival Kid, 1928-29
Gorilla Mystery, 1930
Mickey's Revue, 1932
Mickey's Service Station, 1935
Bugs in Love, 1932
The China Shop, 1934
Broken Toys, 1935
Musicland, 1935

Program 3
(Mickey Mouse &
Silly Symphonies II)
Daily at 3:30
Barnyard Battle, 1928-29
The Moose Hunt, 1931
Mad Dog, 1932
Mickey's Mellerdrummer, 1933
The Clock Store, 1931
The Night Before Christmas, 1932
Water Babies, 1935
Funny Little Bunnies, 1934
The Flying Mouse, 1934

July 7-12

Program 4
(Discovery of Personality)
Daily at 1:00; also Tues. at 6:15

Elmer Elephant, 1936
Mickey's Circus, 1936
The Tortoise and the Hare, 1935
Toby Tortoise Returns, 1936
Mickey's Grand Opera, 1936
Alpine Climbers, 1936
Moose Hunters, 1937
Pluto's Judgment Day, 1935
Who Killed Cock Robin?, 1935

Program 5
(Personalities: Character
Relationships)
Daily at 3:30
Mickey's Kangaroo, 1935
Puppy Love, 1933
Mickey's Rival, 1936
The Country Cousin, 1936
The Adventures of Mr. Toad, 1949

July 14-19

Program 6
(Personalities: Animation
of Objects)
Daily at 1:00; also Tues. at 6:15

Oswald's Mechanical Cow, 1928
Mickey's Choo Choo, 1929
The Whoopee Party, 1932
Santa's Workshop, 1932
Mickey's Steamroller, 1934
Modern Inventions, 1937
Boat Builders, 1938
Susie the Blue Coupe, 1952
Alice in Wonderland, 1950
(doorknob scene)

Little Toot, 1948
Bumble Boogie, 1948

Program 7
(Personalities: Variations
on Mickey)
Daily at 3:30
Alice the Whaler, 1926
Steamboat Willie, 1928
Barn Dance, 1928
The Plow Boy, 1929
Ye Olden Days, 1933
Mickey's Man Friday, 1933
Building a Building, 1933
Mickey's Elephant, 1936
Mickey's Parrot, 1938
Nifty Nineties, 1941

July 21-26

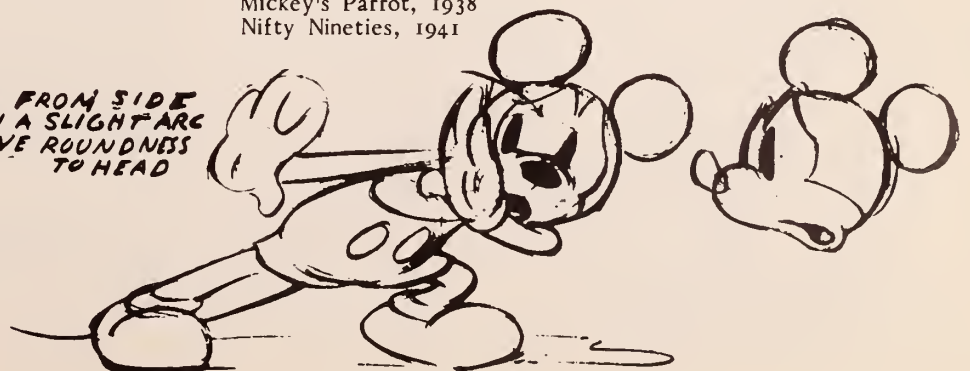
Program 8
(Nature: The Four Elements)
Daily at 1:00; also Tues. at 6:15

Springtime, 1929
Night, 1930
Flowers and Trees, 1932
The Grasshopper and the Ants, 1933
Mickey's Fire Brigade, 1935
The Band Concert, 1935
The Moth and the Flame, 1938
The Old Mill, 1937
The Little Whirlwind, 1941

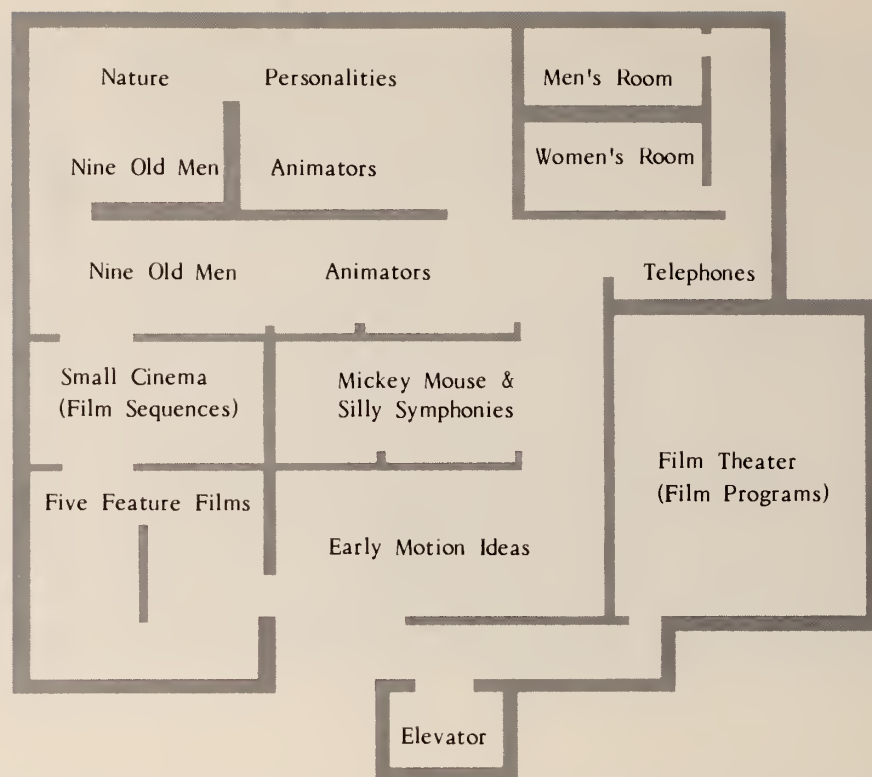
Program 9
(Nature: Perspective)
Daily at 3:30

Trolley Troubles, 1928
Plane Crazy, 1928
Hell's Bells, 1929
Egyptian Melodies, 1931
On Ice, 1935
Clock Cleaners, 1937
Three Orphan Kittens, 1935
Mickey's Trailer, 1938
The Whalers, 1938

EYES MOVE FROM SIDE
TO SIDE IN A SLIGHT ARC
TO GIVE ROUNDNESS
TO HEAD



Floor Plan Second Floor



July 28 – August 2

Program 10
(Star Vehicles)
Daily at 1:00; also Tues. at 6:15

Mickey's Birthday Party, 1942
Society Dog Show, 1939
Donald and Pluto, 1936
Mother Pluto, 1935
Pluto's Dream House, 1940
Goofy and Wilbur, 1939
How to Ride a Horse, 1941
Officer Duck, 1939
The Autograph Hound, 1939

Program 11
(Wartime Cartoons)
Daily at 3:30

Hockey Homicide, 1945
How to Be a Sailor, 1943
The Old Army Game, 1942
Der Fuehrer's Face, 1943
Education for Death, 1943
We're All Together Now, 1943
Out of the Frying Pan, 1943
Reason and Emotion, 1943
Chicken Little, 1943

August 4 – 9

Program 12
Daily at 1:00; also Tues. at 6:15

Snow White and the Seven
Dwarfs, 1937

Program 13
(Human Movement)
Daily at 3:30

Snow White and the
Seven Dwarfs, 1937
(soup-drinking scene)
Alice Solves the Puzzle, 1925
Mother Goose Melodies, 1931
Mickey's Gala Premiere, 1933
Pied Piper, 1933
Goddess of Spring, 1934
The Golden Touch, 1935
Mickey's Polo Team, 1936
Mother Goose Goes
Hollywood, 1938
All the Cats Join In, 1946

August 11 – 16

Program 14
Daily at 1:00; also Tues. at 6:15
Pinocchio, 1940

Program 15
(Virtuoso Scenes)
Daily at 3:30

Figaro and Cleo, 1943
Playful Pluto, 1934
Orphans' Benefit, 1934
The Tortoise and the Hare, 1935
Cock o' the Walk, 1935
Moving Day, 1936
Hawaiian Holiday, 1937
Woodland Cafe, 1937
The Brave Little Tailor, 1938
Three Caballeros, 1945

August 18 – 23

Program 16
Daily at 1:00; also Tues. at 6:15
Fantasia, 1940

Program 17
(Mood Musicals)
Daily at 3:30
Skeleton Dance, 1929
Mickey's Follies, 1929
Blue Rhythm, 1931
Hot Chocolate Soldiers, 1934
Musicland, 1935
Merbabies, 1938
Mr. Duck Steps Out, 1940
Symphony Hour, 1942
Wynken, Blynken and Nod, 1938
Blue Bayou, 1946

August 25 – 30

Program 18
Daily at 1:00; also Tues. at 6:15
Bambi, 1942

Program 19
(Animal Movement)
Daily at 3:30
The Ugly Duckling, 1939
The Ugly Duckling, 1931
Playful Pan, 1930
Mickey's Pal Pluto, 1933
Peculiar Penguins, 1934
Little Hiawatha, 1937
The Pointer, 1939
Ferdinand the Bull, 1938
Farmyard Symphony, 1938

September 1 – 6

Program 20
Daily at 1:00; also Tues. at 6:15
Dumbo, 1941

Program 21
(Transfigurations)
Daily at 3:30
Merry Dwarfs, 1929
When the Cat's Away, 1929
Mickey's Nightmare, 1932
The Mad Doctor, 1933
Lullaby Lane, 1933
Mickey's Garden, 1935
Lonesome Ghosts, 1937
Magician Mickey, 1937
Donald's Crime, 1945
Bone Trouble, 1940

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